

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims replaces all prior listings of claims presented in the application.

Claim 1 (currently amended): An absorbent article comprising

a liquid absorbent layer, the absorbent article having a skin surface and a garment surface;

a pair of compressed grooves, where the liquid absorbent layer is compressed and recessed from a side of the skin surface toward the garment surface, being provided to extend in a longitudinal direction of the article, the compressed grooves being located laterally apart from a longitudinal centerline of the article, each one of the pair of grooves being located on a single side of the longitudinal centerline, the pair of grooves each curving inwardly a separation distance between the compressed grooves being smallest on a lateral reference line of the article or within a range of an equal distance forward and rearward from a [[the]] lateral reference line in the longitudinal direction such that a separation distance between the compressed grooves is smallest at a point within the range, the pair of grooves being substantially parallel to each other over distances forward and rearward of the range; and

a rear flexible portion, where the liquid absorbent layer is recessed from the side of the garment surface toward the skin surface, being provided to extend toward a rear end edge of the article from a starting point that is located closer to the rear end edge than the lateral reference line, at least a portion of the rear flexible portion being located on the longitudinal centerline and between the substantially parallel compressed grooves.

Claim 2 (currently amended): An absorbent article as set forth in claim 1, wherein a front flexible portion, where the liquid absorbent layer is also recessed from the side of the garment surface toward the skin surface, the front flexible portion extending surfaces is ~~provided to extend~~ toward a front end edge of the article from a starting point that is located closer to the front end edge than the lateral reference line, at least a portion of the front flexible portion being located between the compressed grooves, and

the front and rear end edges are located an equal distance apart from the lateral reference line, and the front and rear flexible portions are also located an equal distance apart from the lateral reference line.

Claim 3 (original): An absorbent article as set forth in claim 2, wherein the compressed grooves and the front and rear flexible portions are formed in a pattern symmetrical about the lateral reference line.

Claim 4 (currently amended): An absorbent article as set forth in claim 1, wherein within the ~~the~~ [[a]] range of an equal distance forward and rearward from the lateral reference line in the longitudinal direction, additional compressed grooves are provided side by side with the compressed grooves.

Claim 5 (original): An absorbent article as set forth in claim 1, wherein a mean thickness of the absorbent article at both sides of the rear flexible portion is smaller than that at a

region extending an equal distance forward and rearward from lateral reference line in the longitudinal direction but not overlapping with the rear flexible portion.

Claim 6 (original): An absorbent article as set forth in claim 1, wherein pressure-sensitive adhesive layers for adhering the article to an undergarment are disposed on the garment surface, the pressure-sensitive adhesive layers being located laterally apart from the longitudinal centerline and present at least on the lateral reference line and on both sides of the rear flexible portion.